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Legendary rock icon Janis Joplin is the focal point of Amy Berg's latest, *Janis: Little Girl Blue*.



Couldn't make it to Realscreen London? See what you missed in our photo page.

"It's so difficult now to deliver visual spectacle that makes your eyes open again." 18



on the cover

National Geographic Channel's global doc strand 'Breakthrough' tackles topics from aging to advances in biotechnology. Photo: courtesy of National Geographic Channel

22

DiscoveryVR intends to teach viewers *How to Survive in the Wild* through immersive content.

BIZ

Vice pacts with A+E, Rogers for cable channels; Montgomery set to lead ITV Studios U.S. Group **9**

INGENIOUS

Amy Berg celebrates Janis Joplin **13**

SPECIAL REPORTS

SCIENCE FOCUS

Three science projects that tackle breakthroughs and big questions; a chat with Science Channel's Marc Etkind **16**

VFX/ANIMATION

Looking at the big picture for virtual reality content; Rebuilding history with CGI **22**

REALSCREEN LONDON

The scene at our UK conference's second edition **26**

AND ONE MORE THING

Chris Evans talks *Top Gear* **27**



OF VICE AND ITS VIRTUES

We all knew one during our formative years, and some of you may have been fortunate enough to be one – the Cool Kid who would saunter nonchalantly through the high school corridors, all eyes cast enviously upon him or her. Some of us would be invited into the Cool Kid’s inner circle and, as the loyal entourage, would not only get to bask in the Kid’s glory, but would also have a little bit of the shine rub off on us as well – or so we would hope.

For some time now, Vice Media has been the modern media equivalent of the Cool Kid. Whether it’s been through Vice’s virtual cornering of the millennial market, its ability to develop monetization models that work in the online content space, or the canny deal-making prowess displayed by CEO Shane Smith, the Vice brand has been inextricably linked to two trains steaming their way through the content and media industries today – disruption and expansion.

Both of those trains can actually run in tandem with each other, and don’t have to be on a collision course, and the recent deals struck by Vice Media in the television sector – outlined on page 9 – illustrate that. Sure, many believe that Vice – with its stable of 11-and-counting online channels – is leading the charge in sounding a digitally-driven death knell for television. But anyone who has followed the moves made by the company over the years – from its beginnings as a free, alternative publication based in Montreal, to its forays into books, films, music and eventually, TV content via its programming for HBO – knows that multimedia penetration has always been a top priority.

And while some recent stats and studies concerning viewership, cord-cutting and cord-nevers may provide digital doomsayers with ammunition for proclaiming that linear is dead – or even worse, irrelevant – the dealmakers and their dollars tell a different story.

If, as speculated, Vice is moving towards an IPO, then amassing more cash and scale through myriad international TV deals – be they cable or free-to-air – won’t hurt the cause. As Smith told the *Financial Times* in late 2014, in advance of the “deal spree” of this year, “There’s no time in the foreseeable future when Vice will not be doing a major media deal.” Sounds rather platform-agnostic to me.

And while some may argue that the joint ventures with A+E in the U.S. and Rogers in Canada point towards a “cash for cachet” bid by the more traditional media companies, it just might prove to be smart business for them to be aligned with a brand that possesses such intense loyalty from a coveted, hard-to-reach demographic.

It is true that some newer millennial-focused networks have struggled to break through with big hits, and while Vice’s “voice” continues to connect with growing audiences worldwide online, one might wonder how its irreverent style (sample Vice story: “Inside London’s Hedonistic, Polyamorous Unicorn Movement”) will translate on a 24-hour cable channel. One might also ask how the proliferation of deals could dilute Vice’s “outsider” status among its core audience.

But I view this cross-pollination with excitement and a little bit of hope. From a programming perspective, a little infusion of digital daredevilry could do wonders for linear. If the Cool Kid wants to come over to hang, why would you say no?

Cheers,
Barry Walsh
Editor and content director
realscreen

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COUNTDOWN TO THE SUMMIT

Wow! It feels like just a couple of months ago I was updating you all on the 17th edition of the Realscreen Summit, and here I am to fill you in on the next one – just a couple of months away.

We're moving back to our old 'hood in Washington DC via our new home in the Marriott Marquis, which is kitty corner to our long-time location, the Renaissance. Located in Penn Quarter, there's a wonderful variety of restaurants and watering holes within walking distance.

Once again, we're fortunate to have the support and counsel of a stellar advisory board that is working closely with Barry Walsh, *realscreen's* editor and content director, and conference producer Tiffany Rushton to develop content that aligns with the evolving face of the international non-fiction and unscripted business. Helming the board are **Jana Bennett**, president and general manager, History, and **Brent Montgomery**, CEO, Leftfield Entertainment. Board members are **Meredith Ahr**, NBC's EVP, alternative programming; **Avi Armoza**, CEO, Armoza Formats; **Gary Binkow**, founding partner and chief content officer, Collective Studio 71; **Chris Bonney**, CEO, Cineflix Rights; **Kathleen Finch**, chief programming, content and brand officer, Scripps Networks Interactive; **Chris Grant**, CEO, Electus; **Beth Hoppe**, chief programming executive and general manager, general audience programming at PBS; **Tim Pastore**, president, original programming and production, National Geographic Channels; **Doug Ross**, founder and CEO, Evolution Media; **SallyAnn Salsano**, president, 495 Productions; **Henry Schleiff**, group president, Investigation Discovery, American Heroes Channel and Destination America; **Morgan Spurlock**, president, Warrior Poets Entertainment, and **Geoff Suddleson**, agent in the alternative television department at UTA.

In tandem with the events team, this formidable group will ensure that you're presented with the most current information and inspiration designed to drive your business forward. Confirmed sessions include a look at how innovators in online content are changing the game; a panel on 4K from production to post; and "Revenge of the Doc", which will take a look at the premium content/documentary renaissance that's impacting the non-fiction industry globally. Please see our ads on page 12 and 14 for more details.

'Til next time, go well.
Claire Macdonald
VP & publisher
realscreen

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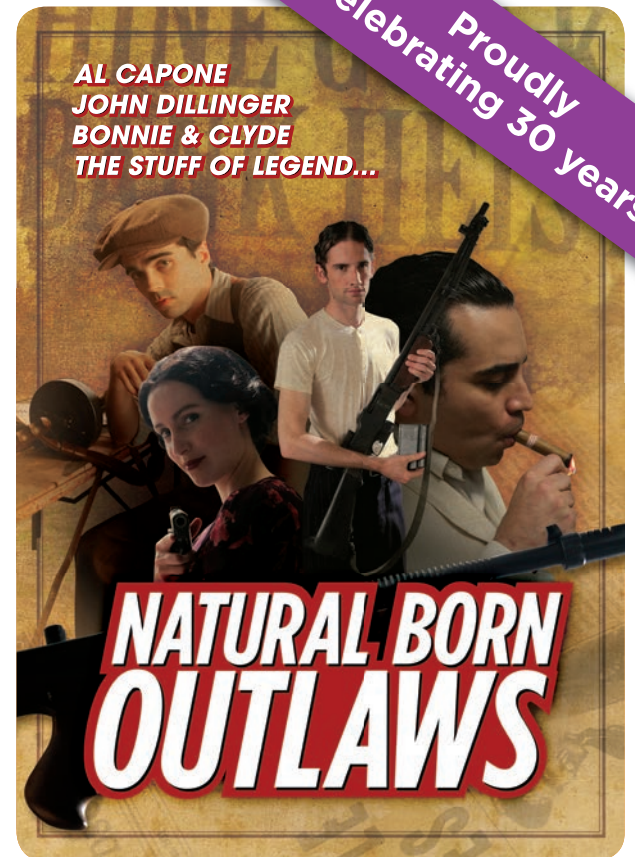
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A+E and Vice's new channel joint venture marks what A+E president and CEO Nancy Dubuc calls "a strategic fit" and what Vice CEO Shane Smith calls "the next step in the evolution of our brand."

BY BARRY WALSH

On the road to Viceland

After months of speculation concerning the fate of a potential channel partnership between A + E Networks and Vice Media in the U.S., both parties have confirmed the joint venture that will see Vice program and produce content for a 24-hour channel, with the working title of Viceland.

The new channel will launch early next year – perhaps as early as February – in approximately 70 million homes through various cable and satellite operators. It will feature hundreds of hours of content produced completely in-house by the Vice Media team.

A + E will oversee technical operations and distribution of the channel, and will work with Vice Media on the ad sales and sponsorship front. Creatively, the channel will be overseen by Vice Media CEO Shane Smith and his team, including film director and Vice Media creative director Spike Jonze, who will also serve as CD of the new channel.

A + E will reportedly up its stake in Vice Media to more than 15%, building on the 10% stake it secured in 2014.

Programming on the channel, in the works for several months, was featured in a Vice upfront in May and includes such series as *Gaycation* with Ellen Page, *Weediquette*, *Huang's World* with Eddie Huang and *Noisey*.

In a statement, A + E Networks president and CEO Nancy Dubuc said that Vice carries "a bold voice and a distinctive model in the marketplace," adding: "This channel represents a strategic fit and a new direction for the future of our portfolio of media assets.

"Shane Smith has led Vice from a fledgling magazine into a global media brand and all of us at A + E are excited to work with him and his passionate and innovative team."

"This network is the next step in the evolution of our brand and the first step

in our global roll-out of networks around the world," added Smith via the official statement. "First: It allows us to be truly platform agnostic and enable our audience to view our content wherever they want. Second: It represents a continued growth in our content quality and raises the ceiling even higher for our brilliant teams to attack stories from long-form features to multi-episode series and even short-form interstitials that will challenge the accepted norms of current TV viewing. Third: We will test new and innovative monetization strategies placing Viceland at the pointy tip of the spear of the rapidly changing terrain of TV advertising."

While Vice is effectively taking over H2 in the U.S., the History off-shoot will still be carried internationally. It is currently viewed in 68 territories. The release issued by A + E stated that the company is "committed to H2's international expansion as well as the production of informational-based historical content."

This will be the second rebrand of an A + E network since Dubuc took the reins at A + E as president and CEO, following the successful rebrand of Bio to FYI.

Shortly after the news broke about the A + E/Vice joint venture, Canada's Rogers Media and Vice announced a 24-hour channel set to replace Bio in Rogers' specialty stable in the winter of 2016. That channel will also be called Viceland, but will be a distinct entity from the U.S. operation. While it will carry some of the U.S. channel's content, a sizeable amount of programming will come from the Vice Canada studio established through the Rogers/Vice deal announced in 2014.

Vice has also established a local channel in Greece via Greek broadcaster Antenna. Recently, Smith told the UK press of plans to launch a dozen networks in Europe over the next 12 to 19 months.

Greenlit & Gone

A look at what's on the way from assorted networks, and what's on the way out.



The Rap Game

Produced by: Intuitive Entertainment
Network: Lifetime

Selling It: In the ATL

Produced by: World of Wonder and Kingdom Reign Entertainment
Network: WE tv

Botched By Nature

Produced by: Evolution Media
Network: E!

America's Next Top Model

Produced by: 10 by 10 Entertainment, The Tyra Banks Company
Network: The CW

King of the Nerds

Produced by: Electus, 5 x 5 Media
Network: TBS

POINTED ARROW: A Producer's Perspective

BY JOHN SMITHSON

At various events I've attended recently I've met many fledgling indie producers who all testify to just how tough it is out there. It's even tougher on the more experienced talent, who are struggling to generate any momentum for their production companies.

I've always believed that this indie business is not for the faint-hearted, but that has never felt so true as now. Our world, for good and for bad, has become noticeably more difficult.

Legal and business affairs has always been a battleground, but now the creative end is also considerably more combative.

I've been on the front line for some time now and am battle-hardened, but in the recent past I've heard grim stories from all corners of the battlefield that have shocked me.

Sadly, I think it's inevitable. This is no longer a cottage industry with bespoke artisan outfits operating out of their spare bedrooms and nurtured by a kind broadcaster.

The stakes are higher, whatever your perspective, and the fundamental changes in our once cozy world destabilize and aggravate. On the network side of the trenches, it's tough. The public service broadcasters are under renewed threat, especially on my home turf here in the UK.

Networks everywhere are under intense commercial pressure, as viewers find their content in increasingly diverse ways. These networks, which are used to being top dog, now have to scrap for every eyeball and every dollar of ad spend. It creates huge stress that percolates down the managerial hierarchy. The executive merry-go-round rotates ever faster as careers crash and burn.

Just across no man's land are the indies – no longer a mass of little guys, but now clusters of powerful and assertive creative businesses.

Many indies are already part of a bigger business and many others are wanting to be.

Creativity doesn't take a back seat in these instances; it simply fuses with the commercial demands. So given these fundamental changes to the balance of power, it's no surprise that there's a bit less love and rather more fisticuffs around.

Where this really has an impact is on the next wave of production companies.

I still believe this is a fantastic business to be in, and my creative passion burns as brightly as it ever has. But if you want to take the plunge, go carefully, have your eyes wide open and only do it if you have an absolute burning desire to enter the fight cage.

I'm struck by how many people still want to take the risk. Is it the ever-evolving creative opportunities? The hope of making some serious money? Perhaps it's both.

It's not universally bleak. There is still a core civility to our business, which is largely run by a very affable bunch of consenting adults, bound together by some resilient core values, relentless creativity and a base level of acceptable rules of behavior.

As the battle gets tougher, so the camaraderie gets stronger. At December's always agreeable gathering of the World Congress of Science and Factual Producers – held this year in Vienna – there remains a warmth amongst the returning delegates, even as hot stories from the front line make it back to the bar by closing time. The omertà that is integral to indie interaction is as strong as ever, as we all gear up for another year, and another tour of duty.

John Smithson is the creative director of Arrow Media, an indie he co-founded in 2011. Previously he was chief executive at Darlow Smithson Productions.



GREENLIT

GONE



MONTGOMERY SET TO LEAD ITV STUDIOS GROUP U.S.

Leftfield Entertainment CEO Brent Montgomery is to become the head of ITV Studios U.S. Group. The deal for Montgomery's appointment at ITV, first reported by UK trade outlet C21, will have the exec taking over from former chairman Paul Buccieri, who left ITV Studios to become the president of A+E nets History and A&E earlier this year.

In a memo from Montgomery to staff, shared with *realscreen*, the exec says there is a "very good chance that [he] will be taking over a new role as the head of ITV's American operation."

"Any sort of deal, despite press reports, is weeks away as it's an extremely complicated deal that is far from done," read the memo, issued by Montgomery in late October. "I had hoped to sit down and write this email in the next couple of weeks in a quiet moment, but instead it's a rush job this morning as we were working hard through the night to try and stem speculative press reports before I got to tell you personally as well as our clients and partners. As I often tell my two-year-old daughter, 'You don't get to control everything.'"

Montgomery went on to say he will be remaining at Leftfield until the deal is finalized. "Leftfield absolutely will continue to be an enormous focus for me, but my role also will definitely expand beyond it; thus, like every move I've made, this creates more opportunity for each of you moving forward."

The exec confirmed that David George, president of Leftfield Entertainment, will run the company, adding, "To hand over the keys to my 'third child' is the hardest professional move I've ever made but to know it's someone as smart and creative as [David George] who shares the same vision to continue to grow and expand it gives me great excitement."

As head of ITV Studios U.S. Group, Montgomery will oversee such production companies as ITV Studios America, Gurney Productions, High Noon Entertainment, Thinkfactory Media and DiGa, in addition to Leftfield Entertainment and its subsidiaries.

ITV paid US\$360 million to acquire 80% of Leftfield Entertainment in May 2014, making the company one of the largest indie unscripted producers in the U.S. **Manori Ravindran**



BEST PRACTICES: THE IMPORTANCE OF PUNCTUALITY

BY CHRIS PALMER AND
SHANNON LAWRENCE

We've all heard the old adage, "If you're not 15 minutes early, you're late." But how can it hurt to be a few minutes late? Tardiness is common in today's society, even though it can cost both you and your cause in the professional world. It is important to be punctual in order to maintain a code of professionalism and to ensure efficiency for all parties involved in a meeting. Here are four specific reasons to be punctual:

Tardiness shows a lack of consideration for other people's time.

Everyone is on a tight schedule, and it can be assumed that people want to adhere to their schedules. By being late, you implicitly assert that only your own schedule and your time matter, and that other people's time is not as important. It's insulting to others. Being on time, on the other hand, shows your respect for and consideration of other individuals.

Tardiness makes you seem unprofessional and unreliable.

Being punctual is the bare minimum that professionals ask of one another. If you can't even bother to show up on time, why should you be entrusted with greater professional responsibilities?

Punctuality increases your chance of securing professional opportunities. Being on time ensures that you are informed and involved. If you're running late, the meeting may start without you and you will miss information. By missing information, you also risk missing the chance to be engaged in professional activities as they are planned and developed. You risk failing to be a valuable team member.

People don't like to be kept waiting.

Wasted time is wasted productivity. It's no fun to twiddle your thumbs waiting for someone. Tardiness is rude and is frustrating for the other party involved. Now that we've reviewed the importance of being on time, how can you make sure that you don't end up being the tardy

party? Apply these four quick tips to put punctuality into practice:

Keep a calendar. Whether you use a calendar app on your phone or keep track of your daily priorities in a written planner, make sure that you have a visual reminder of your commitments. Keeping tabs on your plans helps you manage your time so you can be on time.

Plan and prepare. Know where you are going and how to get there, including the route, where to park, and finding the meeting room. And don't forget to account for possible delays when traveling to your destination.

Sleep. That's right: sleep.

How many of us have been late because we overslept? You can make sure you're on time by getting an appropriate amount of rest and skipping the snooze button in the morning.

Don't overschedule.

Make reasonable assumptions about how much you can fit into your daily schedule. If you have meetings in two different locations, for example, don't schedule them close together. You never know if your first meeting will run late or if you might run into delays trying to get from location to location.

Punctuality is a courtesy that all professionals should observe. Being punctual marks you as considerate, organized and reliable. Try to make punctuality a habit and encourage others to emulate your behavior. It will enhance productivity, effective teamwork, and success in your professional endeavors.

Professor Chris Palmer is the director of American University's Center for Environmental Filmmaking and author of the two newly published books Confessions of a Wildlife Filmmaker and Now What, Grad? Your Path to Success After College. Shannon Lawrence is a filmmaker and MFA candidate at American University. •

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Amy Berg on Janis Joplin: "Janis was so much more than a woman left lonely in her hotel room."

Primal scream

BY KEVIN RITCHIE

After spending years on investigative documentaries about systemic abuse and power structures, *Janis: Little Girl Blue* has inspired director Amy Berg to shift her focus to stories about women.

Many who watch Amy Berg's documentary about Janis Joplin will already know how it ends: with the influential rock singer dead from a heroin overdose in 1970.

That image of Joplin has carried on through the decades thanks to the rock and roll cliché of the 27 Club, which refers to the group of musicians who died, usually tragically, at age 27.

Two of the club's more recent inductees, Kurt Cobain and Amy Winehouse, were the subjects of high-profile docs in 2015 but Berg's *Janis: Little Girl Blue* goes the furthest to reclaim its subject from that characterization.

"Janis was so much more than a woman left lonely in her hotel room," Berg tells *realscreen* during an interview held the day after a screening at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). "I wanted to make sure that her life was celebrated. I wanted to show that without Janis Joplin there wouldn't be an Amy Winehouse, a Melissa Etheridge or a Pink. She laid the groundwork for all of those women. If you're waiting for her to die the whole time, you will not enjoy this film."

Janis: Little Girl Blue pairs archival footage with Joplin's personal letters to her family that chronicle her rise to fame in the late 1960s as a singer, first for the psych-

rock group Big Brother and the Holding Company and later as a solo artist.

Berg delves into Joplin's formative years in her hometown of Port Arthur, Texas, and the events that ultimately drove her to California to escape the social mores prevalent in the 1950s. A free spirit who sang folk music, performed barefoot and later became obsessed with blues and soul music, she was mocked for being overweight and later voted "the ugliest man on campus" by a fraternity at college.

Joplin eventually found kinship and community among the musicians in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury hippie community. A breakthrough performance at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 is presented in *Little Girl Blue* through footage shot by documentarian D.A. Pennebaker showing the then-unknown singer dazzling The Mamas and the Papas' Mama Cass, whose mouth is left agape upon hearing Joplin's piercing wail.

Her romantic relationships with men and women are documented, as is a pivotal love affair that will cast Joplin's death in a new, heartbreaking light for anyone who has not delved deeply into available biographies.

As Berg traces Joplin's life through talk show appearances, concert films, footage shot by her tour

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Berg turned to Alex Gibney for help in bringing partners on board for *Janis: Little Girl Blue*. (Photo: Olivia Fougereol)

manager – including the only known clip of Joplin singing a demo version of her posthumous hit *Me and Bobby McGee* backstage on the 1970 train tour Festival Express – Joplin’s “sex, drugs and rock and roll” image is contrasted by the vulnerability of her correspondence to her mother, which is narrated by musician Chan Marshall (a.k.a. Cat Power).

“Janis Joplin’s music has been a part of my life all the way through,” Berg says. “I had Janis there for break-ups and celebrations. I’ve always loved Janis Joplin, but didn’t understand her on the level that I started to understand her until I read her letters. That was what made me want to do the movie – her letters are so different from the powerhouse female you see on stage.”

Not unlike Joplin, Berg says she had loving but strict parents who often fretted about her exposure to media. As such, those letters became a relatable access point for the filmmaker.

“[The letters] were so vulnerable and intimate. She was always seeking validation – it’s so obvious now – and I thought that was so sad because you’re never as good as your next gig. That’s the world we live in. She was constantly trying to get validation from everyone. She got the best validation when she was performing on stage.”

“As a filmmaker, I felt some connection with people not liking you,” she continues. “You have to get to a point in your career – hopefully I will one day – where you don’t care if people don’t like what you do. So I understand that. I think for a female it’s

even harder because we’re constantly being questioned about the fact that we’re doing something.”

Janis had its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival in August before screening at TIFF, in London and in New York at DOC NYC. Distributor FilmRise acquired the U.S. theatrical rights and will give the doc an Oscar-qualifying run on November 27 in New York and Los Angeles.

Berg signed on to direct the documentary eight years ago after being approached by Joplin’s estate, but financing fell through when a well-known producer – whom Berg declines to name – walked away from the project.

“I was broken-hearted because I put two years of my personal time into trailers and treatments and sales pitches,” she says.

The estate liked her vision and wanted to keep going, so Berg enlisted the aid of documentarian Alex Gibney, whom she calls a deal-making “master.” He helped bring London-based financier/distributor Content Media on board, as well as PBS arts strand ‘American Masters,’ which will premiere the film on U.S. TV in February.

Research and licensing were major undertakings. There are 34 songs in the film as well as archive from Joplin’s family, friends and colleagues, filmmakers such as Pennebaker, and archive houses including Getty Archive, Critical

Past and NBCUniversal Archives, among others.

The research team also managed to access a network of chat rooms – dubbed the “underground network” – frequented by footage collectors from whom they sourced a lot of silent footage.

Janis is Berg’s first historical archive film so her challenge was to tell an emotional story around single-camera performance footage without a lot of exposition. That meant ensuring that the lead-up to key performance scenes –

such as Monterey Pop and Woodstock – had enough context to allow Joplin to do her thing on stage while advancing the drama.

“It was very important to hit certain songs because they resonated in an emotional way,” she says. “I didn’t want to have a lot of talking in and out of these performances.

There are some scenes where you have to narrate your way through them but I wanted her performance to do what it should do. The film kept getting denser and denser and then slimmer and

slimmer; it was a different way to edit.”

Janis comes at the end of a hectic four-year period in which four projects came to fruition. The past two years saw the release of her scripted debut *Every Secret Thing*; a Showtime doc about polygamous sect leader Warren Jeffs, *Prophet’s Prey*; and *An Open Secret*, a controversial film about child sexual abuse in Hollywood.

The latter film became mired in public squabbling among the filmmakers after the doc’s poor box office performance, with producers initiating arbitration proceedings accusing Berg of failing to promote it. (Asked about the situation, her response was “no comment.”)

Berg says that after years of investigating male abuses of power, she enjoyed focusing on one character. *Janis* has also inspired her to shift her focus to female-led stories.

“I now feel a strong responsibility as a female filmmaker to focus on strong female characters,” says the director, who likes to surround herself with women-heavy crews.

“We have to look at the way we portray women in documentaries, because that will bleed its way into narrative filmmaking. A lot of films are inspired by documentaries.” •

“You have to get to a point in your career – hopefully I will one day – where you don’t care if people don’t like what you do.”

BIG SCIENCE

Brett Ratner's *Decoding the Brain* looks into research helping those living with epilepsy and Alzheimer's.

From creative partnerships with Hollywood A-listers, to deep dives into the forces shaping humanity and our planet, producers and networks internationally are pulling out all the stops to create “big bangs” with their science programming. Here, *realscreen* looks at three projects that marry bold ambition with smart science.

‘Breakthrough’

Produced by Imagine Entertainment/Asylum Entertainment; developed by National Geographic Channel and GE
Air date: November-December 2015

Paul Giamatti has his finger on the pulse of just about every compelling project in Hollywood, whether that’s voicing a character in *The Little Prince* or playing N.W.A.’s manager in *Straight Outta Compton*. Things are no different in a Giamatti-directed episode of the six-part National Geographic Channel (NGC) series ‘Breakthrough,’ where the Academy Award-winning actor, quite literally, has his finger on the latest advances in cyborg technology as he conducts brain-body experiments to understand the use of prosthetic limbs.

His directing role in the big-budget partnership between NGC and General Electric (GE) saw Giamatti traveling from Houston to Stockholm to Toronto over the course of a month to investigate breakthroughs in biotechnology. The resulting doc, *More Than Human*, is among six films directed by Hollywood visionaries that blend cinematic storytelling with scientific cases – a programming strategy National Geographic CEO Courteney Monroe calls “emblematic” of where the company is headed almost two years after the premiere of blockbuster 13-part miniseries *Cosmos: A SpaceTime Odyssey*.

“*Cosmos* for us was a real inflection point. It confirmed for us that there was a real interest in high-quality, genuine science programming,” the exec tells *realscreen*. “In the same way that *Cosmos* did, we want to make science

programming that is entertaining and acceptable for global audiences, and one of the best ways to do that is to team up with the very best storytellers and marry them with the very best scientists.”

Alongside Giamatti’s doc, the hour-long films – which will air across National Geographic Channels’ international footprint of 171 countries during November and December – include Peter Berg’s *Fighting Pandemics*, focusing on the recent Ebola outbreak; Akiva Goldsman’s *Energy from the Edge*, about innovative alternative energy projects; Brett Ratner’s *Decoding the Brain*, on research helping those living with epilepsy and Alzheimer’s disease; Ron Howard’s *The Age of Aging*, on advances in extending the human health span; and Angela Bassett’s *Water Apocalypse*, on water conservation projects around the world. All feature scientists and explorers from leading universities and institutions who take viewers through the course of their research – work that could drastically impact their respective fields.

LINKING UP WITH GENERAL ELECTRIC

To bring the science to life, NGC linked up with another global and like-minded brand for what was, Monroe says, a “very symbiotic” partnership. Indeed,

viewers might notice that in the title credits to each film, both Nat Geo and GE logos sit side by side – representative of a copro deal that saw production costs split between the companies. And while such a partnership might suggest a blatant branded content opportunity for the latter corporation, both parties ensure the project's legitimacy as science content.

"This is not an ad sale buy. [GE] aren't just producers of the series from a financial standpoint, but also from a creative standpoint," says Monroe, adding that viewers won't see any GE commercials during the show or elsewhere on the network.

Similarly, Beth Comstock, vice chair of GE, who originally brainstormed the concept for the program with executive producer Brian Grazer back in 2013 before approaching NGC, says only three GE scientists are featured across the six episodes.

"GE worked hand-in-hand with [Grazer and Ron Howard's] Imagine Entertainment, Asylum

Entertainment and NGC to develop the themes, craft the stories and crystallize the intersection between science, tech and the impact it has on the human race," Comstock told *realscreen* over email. "Both NGC and GE approve the topics and directors, will review cuts and provide notes, as is typical with any producing partnership."

'Breakthrough' isn't the first documentary project for GE. The company in 2013 launched the doc shorts series "Focus Forward" featuring 30 three-minute films about innovators and helmed by the likes of Albert Maysles, Steve James, Lucy Walker and Lixin Fan. The films debuted online as well as in festivals around the world, including Sundance.

With this series, however, Comstock notes that it's a step forward for the company, since GE is a full development partner with NGC.

LIKE '30 FOR 30,' BUT FOR SCIENCE

On Grazer's end, the idea for the program stemmed from ESPN Films' Peabody Award-winning '30 for 30' series. The producer – known for the TV series 24 and Oscar-winning film *A Beautiful Mind* among many other projects – envisioned a similar series of independent short films on science, with each honing in on a potential or real problem facing the planet.



Left: Executive producers Brian Grazer and Ron Howard; below: Exploring biotech in *More Than Human*



"The model that I love is the one in sports for ESPN. I think it's the best model of anything that's like this," says Grazer. "I thought this could have a similar sort of structural capability."

While he says the team behind the series was working with "different economics" (the budget for 'Breakthrough' has not

been disclosed) the onus was still on "cinematically, reaching people emotionally."

One of the key people who gave the project that cinematic edge while keeping the program grounded in science was Kurt Sayenga, a freelance executive producer who came on board with co-producer Asylum Entertainment. The project was still in the planning stages when the long-time producer of science programming – whose credits include five seasons of Science Channel's *Through the Wormhole with Morgan Freeman* – was recruited in June of 2014. In a month's time, Sayenga had whittled down the 100 topics discussed by Grazer and his team into 18 tangible films. From there, six were selected.

The producer was familiar with many of the scientists featured in the program before even boarding the project. In Ratner's *Decoding the Brain*, for example, neurologist Dr. Mohamad Koubeissi – who has created a potentially life-altering method to treat epileptic seizures – was someone Sayenga had encountered in a science magazine and then suggested for the series.

"I just thought, 'Wonder if this guy is doing human trials yet?' and fortunately the timing of that worked out just right," he says.

Once the subjects were in place, it was a matter of coordinating with the schedules of six top

Hollywood players with starkly different approaches to directing – no easy task. Each film had 15 to 18 shoot days – all filmed earlier this year – and received its own editor and visual effects shop to ensure episodes were aesthetically distinct.

"The strength of the series is that it's not queuing to a strict formula," says Sayenga. "Usually when you put together a series for somebody, they want you to establish a formula that can keep repeating. It's easier to produce that way, too, if you've got respective landmarks and one set style. Instead, you're looking for six different films from six different people."

THE ROAD AHEAD FOR NAT GEO

Presently, another episode order has yet to be officially greenlit, but Grazer says more 'Breakthrough' – with more Hollywood names attached – is on the way. And soon, Grazer and Howard will reunite with NGC for the forthcoming series *Red Planet*, about the quest to colonize Mars.

As Monroe explains, drawing A-level talent is all part of building the brand up to its potential.

The Morgan Freeman-hosted series on science and religion, *The Story of God*, will air on NGC next spring, while an Alex Gibney-produced doc series and theatrical film on the global water crisis is also in the works. Meanwhile, *Cosmos* host Neil deGrasse Tyson returned for a second season of his talk show, *StarTalk*, earlier this month.

"In some respects, while the channel has been successful, we've really never quite lived up to the promise of the brand," says Monroe. "We've instead spent time chasing others in the marketplace instead of charting our own course."

"Because Nat Geo is about quality, science and adventure and exploration, my vision is this channel lives up to the brand by creating big, event-driven TV that is, quite frankly, worthy of the Nat Geo brand." **Manori Ravindran**



Forces of Nature

A BBC production with PBS, coproduced by France Télévisions | Projected air date: Spring, 2016

Forces of Nature will feature “locations, phenomena and events that you haven’t seen before,” says Andrew Cohen.

“We want to create an understanding of our planet and how people across it interact with its most extreme forces.”

“It’s so difficult now to deliver visual spectacle that makes your eyes open again, and to have novelty driving a series throughout is also difficult,” says BBC Science Unit head Andrew Cohen, speaking to *realscreen* about the Beeb’s upcoming landmark copro with PBS and France Télévisions, the four-part *Forces of Nature*. “Everything’s been filmed,” is the sense that production teams have when you say that. But we wanted to do that with this series. So while we can’t have every sequence be completely unique, there are a large number of sequences here that will make you say, “Wow.”

Forces of Nature’s four parts – divided into the categories of color, shape, motion and matter – attempt to, in

Cohen’s words, “create an understanding of our planet and how people across the planet interact with its most extreme forces.” Since heavy development on the project began two years ago, the production team has carted kit to some of the world’s most fascinating, occasionally inhospitable places – ranging from a sulfur volcano in Indonesia to the Pororoca tidal bore along the Amazon and several points between – in the hopes of catching glimpses of “locations, phenomena and events that you haven’t seen before,” says Cohen.

“It’s journalism that gets you to these extraordinary events first, and then it’s raising of the bar with the kit that you are able to put into very difficult locations,” he says. “So what you get back is important not only in terms of being there for the first

time, but also in how it’s filmed.”

With BBC science productions renowned for innovative filming techniques, Cohen says this project is no exception, with myriad makes and models of camera tech – from drones and wirecams to beyond – being trotted out to get “the” shot. In some instances, the assignments can result in not only the cameras and equipment getting a little banged up, but the operators as well.

“With the volcano, you’re going into an environment where you’re essentially breathing in sulfuric acid and there’s molten sulfur on the ground,” Cohen says. “We had a cameraman who was burned and we had to deal with that on location.” In another instance, while attempting to capture ‘moonbows’ – rainbow-like events that occur when the light of the Moon is reflected and refracted through water droplets or mist – in Iceland, a cameraman dislocated a shoulder.

Beyond potential injury or camera damage, another prime challenge for the team has been the age-old quandary of being at the right place at the right time.

“[If] it’s being out in Norway to catch the aurora borealis, you can take all the kit you want but if it’s cloudy, you could be there for a week and get nothing,” he admits.

The diligence and daring-do is paying off, says Cohen, and he hopes that by the time the series airs, the team will also have a virtual reality component prepped. Although nothing is planned on that front at present (a VR experience is in the works for the BBC’s coverage of British national Tim Peake’s journey to serve on the International Space Station), Cohen says: “It would be criminal for us to not have that component, as you want to give the audience as visceral and immersive an experience as possible.” **Barry Walsh**



NHK and CuriosityStream are using drones, multicopters and other techniques to investigate an evolving island.

Origins of Land

An NHK/CuriosityStream coproduction | Air date: December 2015

In 2013, a volcanic island emerged from the depths of the Pacific Ocean, 1,000 kilometers (or 620 miles) south of Tokyo. Nestled within Japan's Ogasawara island chain, the land mass, first christened Niijima, has grown at a rapid pace for more than a year and has since fused with another island in the chain, Nishinoshima. The ongoing evolution of the island, now officially known as Nishinoshima, and the lessons it can teach scientists will be the focal points of *Origins of Land*, an upcoming special from Japanese pubcaster NHK and digital factual SVOD service CuriosityStream. An as-yet-unnamed French broadcaster may also be boarding the project soon.

The seeds for the project were sown through meetings with scientists and engineers over a year ago, according to Takehiro Asai (pictured, right), senior producer in NHK's Special Programs division. The 1 x 60-minute special is utilizing drones, unmanned submersibles, multicopters and unmanned helicopters, all outfitted with specialized cameras, to capture the action from air and sea in 4K HD. As the conditions on the island are unpredictable and inhospitable – with frequent volcanic eruption, the occasional pyroclastic surge and poisonous gas in the air among the hazards – NHK says the use of such technologies will allow producers to “break the safety zones” and chart the progress of the biggest new island in recorded history to date, and what some scientists claim could point towards the beginnings of a new continent.

The devices are also being used to collect lava samples and look for unique species living in close proximity to the island, which has exploded in size to a 4,000-meter submarine volcano. “An unmanned helicopter captured the first-ever close-up shots of lava flows and the crater; newly developed static video cameras recorded the ecology of rare birds; and rock samples proved new hypotheses about the formation of the continents,” says Asai of the progress made on the special thus far.

Japanese and global media outlets have been following the developing story over the past 18 months, with aerial photography of the fused island mass prompting some to compare the shape of Nishinoshima to cartoon character Snoopy. But beyond that level of curiosity, Asai and the team at NHK expect that the comprehensive look at the story of the island, and what its formation adds to our understanding of our planet's geologic and biological diversity, will “take viewers on a grand scientific adventure and give them a front-row view of land creation that came, quite literally, out of the blue.”

“We overcame great challenges to achieve what is arguably the fundamental goal of television: to give people watching at home an encounter with something they have never seen,” he adds. **BW**



Longtime Discovery Communications exec Marc Etkind has moved from Destination America to head up its Science Channel. Here, he shares with *realscreen* his thoughts on where the network is going next. BY BARRY WALSH

DESTINATION: SCIENCE

In late September, Discovery Communications announced a change at the top for its Science Channel brand, replacing general manager and Discovery veteran Rita Mullin with another long-time member of its family, Marc Etkind. While he previously served as general manager of its Destination America brand – home to series ranging from *BBQ Pitmasters* to paranormal offerings such as *Ghost Asylum* – Etkind's own roots in his pre-network career are firmly entrenched in science production, and as such, he sees the move as a sort of homecoming.

"I majored in biology, I studied birds, I worked at a marine lab and Yale's med school," he recounts. "And when I started making shows, I was making them for *Scientific American*, *Discover*, content for the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, and segments for *The Science Times*."

"My DNA is in science producing, and I'm so excited to get back to science," he enthuses. "It's a genre that I know, love and have deep respect for."

With Discovery Communications realigning its U.S. network portfolio in August, Rich Ross was given oversight of Science and Animal Planet, in addition to his previous role as president of Discovery Channel. And with Ross stating repeatedly his aim to bring an "informational" sensibility back to Discovery Channel – including a firm commitment to science and natural history – Etkind believes that refocusing will also bode well for Science, and says that John Hoffman, EVP of documentaries and specials for Discovery Channel, is also casting an eye towards premium science docs.

"Because we're part of Rich's group it means we have tremendous resources to draw from," Etkind

says, pointing towards the upcoming airing of *Telescope*, a behind-the-scenes look at the building of the James Webb Space Telescope, to be directed by Nathaniel Kahn (*My Architect*, *Two Hands*) and set to air across both Discovery and Science in early 2016.

"We're looking for big, scientific films – we're looking for blue-chip," he says. "Other people are going to dabble in it and air science docs because they want to put a little polish on their brand, but for us, it's our DNA."

Blue-chip and premium content usually comes with a premium price tag, which international broadcasters often offset via coproduction. Etkind says that while "we like coproductions," the preferred route for Science as part of the global Discovery portfolio is full commissioning.

"We don't rule out copros, especially with some of the bigger blue-chip projects," he offers. "But when we can, a commission is always better for us."

Etkind says he aims to see the network's content offerings position Science as a destination for science news as it happens, pointing to recent Mars-focused programming that aired in conjunction with discoveries of water on the red planet. He also cites *Alien Megastructures*, a special that aired in late October focusing on the speculation concerning unusual light activity surrounding the star KIC 8462852, as part of a move towards becoming "more timely and relevant."

With Science posting double-digit ratings increases year-on-year across its key demos,



according to Nielsen, Etkind says ramping up the network's digital assets will also be a prime concern going forward.

"Our viewers are already technologically savvy," he says. "They're looking at our site, they're looking at Test Tube (Discovery's science platform). They're already coming to us in multi-platform, but we want to build on that even more."

That strategy may include more moves into the VR space. At press time, Science was working towards crafting a VR online experience to tie in with its *Secret Space Escapes* series launching in November, and more could be on the way.

In summary, Etkind says that under his watch, the onus will be on staying true to the brand – "It's grounded in science and will continue to be," he promises – while highlighting programming that asks the "big questions."

Recalling NASA's recent New Horizons mission to Pluto – a nine-year voyage covering some three billion miles that allowed us to get a closer glimpse of the "dwarf planet" – Etkind remarks: "The reason that I went into science television some 20 years ago is that it's awe-inspiring. Those are the kinds of moments we want to capture. We're trying to bottle that wonder, awe and curiosity." ●

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BY DANIELE ALCIÑI

VRROOM

Discovery's *MythBusters* aims to deliver one VR experience per episode for its final season in 2016.

With more producers and broadcasters investing in the burgeoning technology, plans for more virtual reality content are accelerating.

But will it be a platform that's built to last, or will it run out of gas?

The promise of virtual reality has been just over the horizon for the last 20 years, with players such as Virtuality Group and Sega VR jumping headfirst into the VR space in the early 1990s, developing stereoscopic visors and joysticks for arcade gaming. It wasn't until Facebook's acquisition of Oculus VR – the Menlo Park, California-based immersive VR tech company – last year in a deal worth US\$2 billion that the futuristic technology became a huge talking point in the content industry.

Though Oculus VR and its Rift – the company's groundbreaking head-mounted display – are primarily focused on bringing virtual reality to the burgeoning gaming industry, well-established tech companies and start-ups alike have begun to develop hardware and camera rig systems for fully immersive, 360-degree cinematic VR experiences. Recently developed or soon-to-launch systems include Samsung Gear VR's Project Beyond, a stereoscopic omniview 3D rig fitted with 17 cameras that streams in real time; Nokia's Ozo, featuring eight lenses with 2K by 2K sensors; GoPro's Odyssey, a 16-camera module mount built specifically for Google Jump's "ecosystem"; and Jaunt's NEO, the fifth generation of its camera systems which will be initially leased to its partners, and rumored to feature a 27-camera rig capable of shooting resolutions as high as 16K.

With these 360-degree cinematic solutions on track to become viable plug-and-play systems, content producers across the board are attempting to get in on the ground floor as the possibilities of filmmaking within the VR space continue to expand beyond what was initially thought.

It was approximately a year ago when executives at Discovery Communications began to take the emerging platform very seriously, assembling top directors from across the company's production and design teams to launch the DiscoveryVR department, which rolled out its mobile app on August 27.

"It was really, more than anything, [about] trying to jump into the space quickly but also showing fans that we were really committed to it longer term, so they could rest assured that if they came back to [the DiscoveryVR] app every week there'd be new content," Conal Byrne, senior VP of digital media at Discovery Communications, tells *realscreen*.

Discovery is attempting to hold that promise as it steers its VR production into two avenues. Firstly, the global media giant will analyze all of its on-air programs – from *Deadliest Catch* and *River Monsters* to *Puppy Bowl* and everything between – to see which can be further extended into the virtual realm, though a number of series have already received the VR treatment.

The VR component of *Survivorman* will feature a series of eight Les Stroud-fronted "experiences"; *Gold Rush* will also produce eight videos that plunge users into the Klondike for 360-degree stories of going for gold; and *MythBusters* is aiming to deliver one VR experience per episode – from small-scale implosions to getting attacked by a horde of 200 zombies – for its final 14th season which debuts January 9.

Discovery is also building what it calls "Digital Original Series" – VR series not connected to an on-air property. The network has already launched two channels on its app: Planet and Adventure.



Left: Secret Location's *Ebola Outbreak: A Virtual Journey* for PBS 'Frontline'. Right: Beyond Productions' immersive look at the Cold War-era submarine, the HMAS Onslow.



"Planet is us going out, trying to immerse people in incredible locations, be it watching the sunset at Half Moon Bay or the Mojave Desert – it's a great way to use VR as a passive immersion," Byrne explains. "The other is Adventure – putting people in heart-pounding situations like mountain biking, surfing or freeboarding down Lombard Street, the windiest road in San Francisco. There's stuff to come on the app like zip-lining through the jungle in Costa Rica, where we strapped a VR rig to a helmet cam."

With the introduction of VR into filmmaking, a host of new challenges have also been ushered into the process, which could force conventional storytelling and cinematic language to be entirely rewritten.

Some of the larger production hurdles come in the form of traditional filming and editing techniques. From cutaways and blocking the shot to utilizing multiple camera rigs and lighting a scene, all elements are left wide open for exposure, says Pietro Gagliano, partner and executive creative director at Secret Location.

"When you're creating a frameless story, you really have to think about how you're architecting that experience," he explains. "We're so rooted in the film industry and all of the conventions that are tried, tested and true that we basically have to create a new visual language for this industry."

But despite its many challenges, the Toronto-based interactive entertainment agency has managed to carve a niche into the space, winning five Emmys in the process, including the first ever awarded to a VR production for their *Sleepy Hollow* experience. With its latest project, Secret Location helped push PBS and its investigative journalism strand 'Frontline' into the VR fold at September's ONA15 digital journalism conference by fitting filmmaker Dan Edge with a 3D printed camera rig consisting of 14 GoPros for *Ebola Outbreak: A Virtual Journey*. The film

attempted to immerse viewers in the story of last year's West African Ebola outbreak, which has claimed upwards of 11,000 lives.

"*Ebola Outbreak* was very well received [at ONA15] in that this is going to potentially be a whole other visual language for journalists to tell stories and for truth to be told," Gagliano says, noting that the company will be ramping up its factual output over the next few months but remaining tight-lipped on further details.

In a new vertical where the waters are largely untested, a question experienced filmmakers are consistently faced with is how much control needs to be relinquished in order for the user's experience to be fully immersive. It's about balance, says Mike Drachkovitch, founder and CEO of Overture.

"What we've learned is if it's just pure presence, the viewer often gets bored after a certain period of time; however, if it's too story-driven you lose the purpose of why it's in VR," he explains. "For us at Overture, it's finding that happy medium."

Since launching in May as the VR content studio of 44 Blue Productions, Overture takes a story-first approach to its development slate. Its first two projects, for instance, promise to immerse viewers into the lives of inmates at maximum-security prisons across the U.S. for MSNBC's *Lockup 360*, and shadow first responders in New Orleans as they respond to emergency calls in real time in A&E's *Nightwatch 360*, respectively.

"*Lockup* is such a unique experience – going behind bars, being in a cell with an inmate, learning about their day and the issues within the criminal justice system as a whole," Drachkovitch says.

"These are things that are uniquely served by the medium of VR, so the question is how do we identify those stories, those issues and environments that will really benefit from being told in VR."

While there is palpable excitement brewing surrounding the medium, years of anticipation

for virtual content have prompted some concern within the industry that the method will ultimately be rejected by consumers – similar to the highly touted but underperforming move to 3D television. The key difference, however, is that 3D technology is an overlay to an existing medium while VR must be treated as a unique format with a new viewership and experience in mind.

"I think [VR adoption] comes down to the availability of the tech as well as the much more immersive experience VR offers," says John Luscombe, GM and executive VP at MythBusters producer Beyond Productions. "Even the simplest form of VR – looking at 'magic window' content on a mobile phone – is compelling and instantly accessible. And unlike 3D, there are legitimate educational and commercial applications of the technology that will extend the user base well beyond gaming and entertainment."

Luscombe, who championed the VR push for MythBusters, has been expanding the medium out to traditional and lifestyle series in the Australian prodco's wheelhouse as a "value add."

Additionally, Beyond Productions has been busy originating VR content in its own right, including securing a partnership with Ensemble Australia, a non-traditional creative agency, to develop an immersive experience shot aboard the Cold War-era submarine HMAS Onslow. The program – part of the Action Stations experience at Sydney's Australian National Maritime Museum – will shadow the craft's commander as he takes the user on a 360-degree presentation through the submersible and will integrate animation and archival sequences.

"When anyone puts on the headset, it's one of those transformational moments," Drachkovitch summarizes. "This idea to have complete presence somewhere, to be connected and empathize with characters in dimensions we've never been able to access before, is truly unique."

ANIMATING THE ANCIENTS

BY BARRY WALSH

Two upcoming projects are using cutting-edge CGI to bring to life ancient civilizations. Here, the animation teams and producers behind the programs reveal how they're reconstructing history.



A CURIOUS WORLD: THE BRONZE AGE

Produced and animated by Pixeldust Studios
Airing on CuriosityStream in January 2016

Having produced and animated the first season of CuriosityStream's *A Curious World* series, Washington DC-based studio Pixeldust was tasked with tackling 2,000 years of history for the follow-up.

A Curious World: The Bronze Age scans, over the course of three episodes, ancient civilizations in the Aegean/Mediterranean, Egypt and Near East, in the period from 3,000 – 1,000 BC. As part of the overview, the Pixeldust team had to reconstruct four capitals, including Egypt's Thebes, the Greek capital of Mycenae, and the ancient Sumerian/Babylonian city of Uruk.

"The scarcity of artifacts and ruins from the Bronze Age was a major challenge," explains Pixeldust president and creative director Ricardo Andrade. "While ancient Egypt is well documented, other capitals such as Uruk and Mycenae had far fewer reference materials. Our team worked with the archaeologists and scholars who are part of the series to identify the most compelling materials that are still in existence."

With a toolkit that included Maya as the main 3D application, Mental Ray for rendering and After Effects for compositing, Pixeldust turned to Google Maps of the current locations for each city as a framework for their creations, using imagery of ruins to geo-locate them on the maps, creating a new custom map, and then painting in the ancient streets, houses, and temples for the 3D models that were ultimately used.

2.5D camera mapping was also used on frescoes and ancient artifacts, by layering images from the Bridgeman Art Library into three-dimensional space and adding motion.

Andrade says Pixeldust's "highly collaborative partnership" with the CuriosityStream executive team allows the company to streamline the process by delivering rough cuts with reference images instead of animations.

"This makes the process run more smoothly and adds more in both value and creativity to the final product," says Andrade, adding that being asked to deliver animations early in the process "can lead to multiple revisions, delays and overages."



RAISING POMPEII

Produced by Twofour and Handel Productions, CGI by Digital Dimension
Airing on ITV, CBC, Canal D and other broadcasters in 2016

In 79 AD, the ancient Roman city of Pompeii, near present-day Naples, was in the midst of recovering from a severe earthquake in 62 AD that had destroyed scores of buildings, temples, roads and bridges. While many had left following the earthquake to other Roman settlements, a good number of its 11,000 remaining inhabitants stayed to rebuild. That effort would prove to be in vain, with the eruption of nearby Mount Vesuvius burying the town in multiple levels of volcanic material.

In the upcoming one-hour special *Raising Pompeii*, UK-based Twofour and Montreal-based Handel Productions have the daunting task of effectively raising the city from the cinder and ash via CGI, 3D terrain mapping, and expert testimony. Adding to the challenge is the need to place two presenters in the action for different international versions – David Suzuki for the version that will air on the CBC's 'The Nature of Things' strand and Michael Buerk for the program to air on ITV.

"We have another version with no presenter, so every shot has to be stand-alone," says Handel's vice president and executive producer André Barro.

The producers turned to Montreal VFX shop Digital Dimension to create a photorealistic, historically accurate version of Pompeii. Working from start to finish in Maya, rendering in Red Shift, and compositing in Nuke, the team there began working in earnest on the project in September, and will be delivering its final shots in December, according to Digital Dimension senior producer Peter Skovsbo.

While Skovsbo cites the post schedule as the biggest hurdle the team of approximately 15 at Digital Dimension will have to face, Barro says budget considerations prompted the producers to focus on specific locations to hone in on. But having worked with the VFX company on other projects, Barro says taking a collaborative approach always yields the best results.

"We don't just have the studios doing the storyboard, we want them to be a part of it," he says. "For us, it's less about the technology than the people. We're chasing the talent." ●

Sundance Film Festival 2016



January 21st - 31st 2016
Park City, Utah

Keep in touch! Stay up to date on ticketing information, the Festival lineup, filmmaker interviews and additional Festival tips at [**sundance.org/festival**](http://sundance.org/festival)

Sundance Institute is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the discovery and development of independent artists and audiences in film and theatre.



REALSCREEN LONDON 2015

For the second year running, international producers, network executives, distributors and content creators convened in the UK capital for two days of discussion, debate and deal-making at Realscreen London. The October event brought close to 300 delegates to the London Marriott Hotel Grosvenor Square, and was punctuated with two cocktail soirees, courtesy of Discovery Networks International, Pact and UK Indies. Thanks to all for taking part, and see you next year. (Photos by Daniele Alcini)



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- a) CuriosityStream's Elizabeth Hendricks North
- b) Zig Zag's Danny Fenton and Arrow Media's John Smithson
- c) Lion Television's Nick Catliff
- d) Barcroft Media's Sam Barcroft
- e) All3Media's Jane Turton
- f) T Group's Jenny Daly and ICM Partners' Pippa Lambert
- g) Vice Media's Alex Miller
- h) Voltage TV's Sanjay Singhal
- i) Maker Studios' Luke Hyams

BY DANIELE ALCINI

SWITCHING GEARS

Chris Evans (left) and *Top Gear* comrade Stig face the press in Cannes. (Photo: courtesy of the BBC)

Following one of the more infamous “fracases” in recent television history, BBC Production’s latest incarnation of automotive format *Top*

Gear – the world’s most widely watched factual program, with an estimated global audience of 350 million in 212 territories – will revolve around BBC Radio 2’s Chris Evans as primary host, with the British pubcaster inking him to a three-year exclusive deal beginning January 2016.

The host of *The Chris Evans Breakfast Show* and the self-professed “human alarm clock for the UK” since 2010, Evans has become accustomed to having a full plate. On top of producing a daily radio show with an audience of more than 10 million listeners per week, Evans previously served as the face of the BBC’s *The One Show* from 2010-2015; celebrated the 20th anniversary of the popular entertainment series *TFI Friday* with a one-off special for Channel 4, which resulted in a full series commission for late 2015; and recently finished a memoir, *Call the Midlife*, while on

the flight to Cannes for a short *Top Gear* promotional stint during the 31st annual MIPCOM market.

Sitting down during a Q&A roundtable session with assorted international journalists, Evans declined to speculate on his as-yet-unnamed co-presenters, or whether a much-rumored female co-host would be appointed. “We’re very close to telling you some things about who will be on the show,” he said with a grin. “I wish I could totally say, but I can’t because the contracts aren’t signed.”

What was your first reaction when you were approached for *Top Gear*?

Disbelief. It was a question I never thought I’d be asked, to be honest. I thought James [May] and Richard [Hammond, former *Top Gear* co-hosts to ousted host Jeremy Clarkson] would carry on. That’s what I thought was going to happen – that’s what I wanted to happen as a fan of the show.

Are you at all concerned that fans will flock to Clarkson’s new Amazon motoring series instead of the BBC *Top Gear* format?

There’s no fear of that at all – some

will because they’ve let me know quite clearly on social media. But as a fan of the program I know what I want to see, and what I want to see is exciting cars, amazing films, brilliant locations, clever twists – if you make a quality product, people will come to it, so that’s what I’ve got to do. I’ve had a lot of people who loved *Top Gear* [say they] slightly started to fall out of love with it over the last few years because cars seemed to almost be second. I think that we can move cars back to being the stars of the show, which is what they should be.

Will *Top Gear* and Amazon’s series be sufficiently different?

Who knows? They’ve got a brilliant act. They’re very funny and their chemistry is amazing – it takes you years to develop it. I’ve got a contract for three years, so it’s hopefully got to last for three years. It’s not about 54 shows and three Christmas specials; it’s about May and June next year, which is still seven months from now. I’ve been working on the show since I got the job, literally. I wrote the first running order 24 hours after I got that phone call. ●



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and plan ahead!

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